

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

**Interview With AllAfrica.com**

*July 2, 2009*

*President's Visit to Ghana*

Q. We asked visitors to our site, AllAfrica.com, what they might be interested in with respect to your policy. And as you might imagine, the responses are everywhere: conflict resolution, development issues, trade issues, et cetera. But they and we have one immediate question.

*The President.* Right.

Q. How is it that you happened to pick Ghana as the first place to visit in sub-Saharan Africa?

*The President.* Well, part of the reason is because that Ghana has now undergone a couple of successful elections in which power was transferred peacefully, even a very close election. I think that the new President, President Mills, has shown himself committed to the rule of law, to the kinds of democratic commitments that ensure stability in a country. And I think that there is a direct correlation between governance and prosperity. Countries that are governed well, that are stable, where the leadership recognizes that they are accountable to the people and that institutions are stronger than any one person, have a track record of producing results for the people. And we want to highlight that.

*U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa*

Q. And I assume that you'd like to see a lot more Ghanas in Africa. And part of your policy would be, I assume, to encourage that.

*The President.* Absolutely.

Q. But how? Do you get——

*The President.* Well, part of it is lifting up successful models. And so by traveling to Ghana, we hope to highlight the effective governance that they have in place.

I don't think that we can expect that every country is going to undergo these transitions in the same way at the same time. But we have seen progress in democracy and transparency and rule of law, in the protection of property rights, in anticorruption efforts. We have seen progress over the last several years. In some cases, though, we're also seeing some backsliding. In my father's own country of Kenya, I'm concerned about how the political parties do not seem to be moving into a permanent reconciliation that would allow the country to move forward. And Kenya is not alone in some of the problems that we've seen of late, postelection or preelection.

And we just want to make sure that people are mindful that this isn't just some abstract notion that we're trying to impose on Africa. There is a very practical, pragmatic consequence to political instability and corruption when it comes to whether people can feed their families, educate their children, and we think that Africa—the African Continent is a place of extraordinary promise as well as challenges. We're not going to be able to fulfill those promises unless we see better governance.

## *U.S. Role in Africa*

*Q.* Do you have, with respect to that, priorities in terms of countries or regions? For instance, West Africa is extremely important in terms of oil, or East Africa in terms of some of the strategic concerns of the United States?

*The President.* I think the entire continent is important. And keep in mind that although I'm visiting Ghana on this particular trip, we've already had Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe in the Oval Office. We've had Kikwete from Tanzania in my office. And in each case, I'm trying to send the same message. You've seen some very good work by the administration in Tanzania, focusing on how to deliver concrete services to the people, and wherever folks want to help themselves, we want to be there as a partner. And I think that you've got some very strong leadership in Africa that is ready to move forward, and we want to be there with them.

On the economic front, that means opening up better trade opportunities. It means that we are interested not just in foreign aid, but in how we strengthen the capacity for development internally in these countries, and we want to work in a multilateral context, as well as the bilateral strengthening of relations with many of these countries.

But as you point out, there are both strategic, national security, economic, environmental reasons why we think this region is important. And part of the reason we wanted to—although we're only going to one country this time, I actually thought that it made sense for us to connect a trip to Ghana to a previous trip with the G-8, and we'll be meeting a number of African countries in Italy during the G-8 meeting—before that, a meeting in Russia—to show that Africa is directly connected to our entire foreign policy approach, that it's not some isolated thing where once every term you go visit Africa for a while to check that box, but rather it's an ongoing part of a broader discussion about how we move many of these international challenges forward.

## *Use of Technology in African Aid*

*Q.* Development assistance will presumably be an important piece of your Africa policy. Now, development assistance is pretty fragmented, whether you look at the United States or you look at it globally, in the sense of varying countries have varying approaches. And now you, more than any President, are associated with using technological tools, and I can't help but wonder if you have in mind or have thought about using technology to bring some coherence, if you will, like tracking how aid works or goes and where it goes, et cetera.

*The President.* Look, I think you make a very important point, and that is that even just within the U.S. Government, our aid policies have been splintered among a variety of agencies, different theories embraced by different people depending on which administration, which party is in power at any given time. Trying to create something steady and focused on and always basing our policies on what works and not on some ideological previous position is going to be very important.

And technology can play a very important role in streamlining our aid to countries, making sure that we're tracking how that aid is being applied, making sure that it's reaching the people it's intended to reach. One of the concerns that I have with our aid policy generally is that Western consultants and administrative costs end up gobbling huge percentages of our aid overall. And it seems to me that what we should be doing is trying to minimize our footprint and maximize the degree to which we're training people to do for themselves. So I think using the Internet, using software, using modern technology to improve delivery systems is important.

Now, I also think on the ground in many of these countries, how we think about not high-tech stuff but low-tech technologies to, for example, improve food production is vitally important. And I'm still frustrated over the fact that the green revolution that we introduced into India in the sixties, we haven't yet introduced into Africa in 2009. In some countries, you've got declining agricultural productivity. That makes absolutely no sense. And we don't need fancy computers to solve those problems. We need tried and true agricultural methods and technologies that are cheap and are efficient, but could have a huge impact in terms of people's day-to-day well-being.

### *African Development*

Q. In addition, you mentioned just a few minutes ago also the importance of investment and not just aid. What's the balance between assistance and investment? You get—most businesses get a bigger return on their investment in Africa than any other part of the world. So should that receive more emphasis than it's been getting? What kind of balance in your mind exists between development assistance and—

*The President.* Well, a couple of points I would make. Number one, you're not going to get investment without good governance. So that's part of the reason why we emphasize it. Again, this is a very practical, hard-headed approach to how we're going to see improvements in the daily lives of the peoples of Africa. If government officials are asking for 10, 15, 25 percent off the top, businesses don't want to invest there. That's point number one.

Point number two: I think that when my father left Kenya and traveled to the United States back in the early sixties, the GDP of Kenya and South Korea weren't equivalent; Kenya's was actually higher. What's happened over that 50-year period? What you've seen is Korea combine foreign investment, integration with the global economy, with a strategic sense of certain industries that they can promote for export; great emphasis on education for a skilled workforce; insisting that foreign investment is accompanied by technology transfer so that homegrown industries can be built and nurtured.

So we've got models out there. We know what it might take. What we haven't seen is, is a consistent, steady application of some of these models over time in Africa, and I think that now is the time to start.

### *U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa*

Q. Is that a failure of U.S. policy, or is that a failure of governance in Africa?

*The President.* I would say that the international community has not always been as strategic as it should have been, but ultimately, I'm a big believer that Africans are responsible for Africa.

I think part of what's hampered advancement in Africa is that for many years, we made excuses about corruption or poor governance, that this was somehow the consequence of neocolonialism, or the West has been oppressive, or racism—I'm not a big—I'm not a believer in excuses.

I'd say I'm probably as knowledgeable about African history as anybody who's occupied my office. And I can give you chapter and verse on the—why the colonial maps that were drawn helped to spur on conflict, and the terms of trade that were uneven emerging out of colonialism.

And yet the fact is we're in 2009, and the West and the United States has not been responsible for what's happened to Zimbabwe's economy over the last 15 or 20 years. It hasn't been responsible for some of the disastrous policies that we've seen elsewhere in Africa. And I think that it's very important for African leadership to take responsibility and be held accountable.

And I think the people of Africa understand that. The problem is, is that they just haven't always had the opportunities to organize and voice their opinions in ways that create better results.

*President's Legacy/U.S. Role in Africa*

Q. In the last minute or so of our conversation, even though you are really barely into your Presidency, I already feel compelled to ask you a legacy question. [Laughter] And that is: What, when you finish your Presidency, do you expect your stamp on Africa policy to be? What do you think that will be?

*The President.* What I would like, at the end of my term in office, to be able to say that the United States was an effective partner with countries throughout Africa in building the kinds of institutions, both political, civil, economic, that allow for improving standards of livings and greater security for the people of Africa, that we've moved them on a trajectory in which they are integrating with the global economy, and that a young person growing up in Johannesburg or Lagos or Nairobi or Djibouti can say to themselves, "I can stay here in Africa; I can stay in my country and succeed, and through my success, my country and my people will get stronger."

That would be a good legacy. I don't expect that we're going to get there in 4 years or 8 years, but I think we can get on that path. And the United States is a critical partner in that process.

All right?

Q. I need another hour or so. [Laughter] But I thank you for your time.

*The President.* Thank you so much.

NOTE: The interview began at 3:03 p.m. in the Blue Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe; and President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete of Tanzania. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 7. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

*Categories:* Interviews With the News Media : Interviews :: AllAfrica.com.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Kikwete, Jakaya Mrisho; Mills, John Evans Atta; Tsvangirai, Morgan.

*Subjects:* Africa : Agricultural production :: Decline; Africa : Agricultural production :: Improvement efforts; Africa : AllAfrica.com; Africa : Democracy and human rights issues; Africa : Democracy efforts; Africa : Economic development strategies, strengthening efforts; Africa : Foreign capital investment; Africa : Government officials, corruption issues; Africa : International assistance; Africa : Relations with U.S.; Africa : Trade with U.S.; Africa : U.S. assistance; Commerce, international : Group of Eight (G-8) nations; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Foreign policy, U.S. : Foreign aid policies :: Inconsistencies; Foreign policy, U.S. : Foreign aid policies :: Technological advancements to improve delivery

of aid; Ghana : Democracy efforts; Ghana : President; Ghana : President Obama's visit; Italy : President Obama's visit; Kenya : Democracy and human rights issues; Russia : President Obama's visit; Tanzania : President; Tanzania : U.S. assistance; Zimbabwe : Economic decline; Zimbabwe : Prime Minister.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD200900545.